



Establishing Advisory Councils/Committees

Advisory councils or committees are a tool to assist the school administrator and instructor to provide the best and most up-to-date instruction possible. Advisory councils are organized and meet at frequent intervals for the purpose of assisting educators in providing quality, up-to-date and relevant vocational instruction. Two types of councils, general and program advisory councils, assist education agencies, secondary schools and community colleges.

- General Advisory Councils—The purpose of this single overall council is to assist the local school administration in its effort to coordinate all career and technical programs. The concerns of the general council are more global and address such matters as
 - Identifying community labor demand in general occupational areas as well as specific occupations.
 - Recommending new offerings which should be provided in addition to the existing program offerings
 - Making policy recommendations to the local school administration based on identified unmet needs.

This council may consist of program advisory council members, other interested parties representing the community, or any combination of these two groups.

- Program Advisory Councils—The purpose of these councils is to assist the local school administration, board, and instructor in their efforts to plan, develop, and keep contemporary a single career and technical program or service area. In the case of Tech Prep programs, colleges and local school districts are encouraged to share an advisory council for the program sequence (secondary and postsecondary).

General Responsibilities and Composition of Local Advisory Councils

The purpose of both the general and program councils at the local level is to assure continual relevance and updating of career and technical programs. Council members representing employers, employees, and the general public can contribute to program relevance and updating when this advice is conveyed to those in the educational system and the community through deliberations focusing on common needs and goals.

Activities in which councils are typically involved include advising on:

- Needs for pre-employment instruction
- Career planning
- Career orientation
- Professional development
- Placement services
- Curriculum planning
- Resource persons
- Projects or activities
- Sources of teaching materials and equipment

Typically, a successful advisory committee will:

- Hold at least semi-annual meetings to discuss the conditions of the programs. Three or four meetings per year may be needed if conditions require.
- Set agendas and mail copies to all concerned prior to the meetings
- Have record of meetings kept and distributed to council members after the meeting.

Membership

Due to its role of advising the school administration on the overall direction for career and technical programming, the membership background of the **General Advisory Council** must be sufficiently broad so that the result is the best thinking of the community. For this reason, the size of the council is seldom less than 10 members and often includes up to 20 persons.

Since the council plays a visionary role, the backgrounds of the members should represent, as nearly as possible, all facets of the employment community; in addition, there should be members who represent those sectors which have concerns about the human development of the individual and economic development of the community. Usually the number of employees serving on this type of council are fewer in number than employers. Representatives on this council should include the sectors of business, industry, labor, and agriculture and fairly represent each gender and minority group represented in the community. The majority of members are persons who are knowledgeable about various employment trends. Membership may include representatives from social service agencies, various activist ethnic groups, employment agencies, and federally funded employment and training efforts in the area. Membership of the council should be reviewed to assure membership is gender balanced and includes nontraditional workers if possible.

Career and technical educators have found that **Program Advisory Councils** seldom have fewer than five members nor more than 15 members. Members are representative of business and industry, and labor served by the program area, and fairly represent both genders and each minority group in the community. Again, the inclusion of nontraditional workers is recommended. For Tech Prep programs, membership should also include ex-officio representatives from both secondary and postsecondary instructional levels.

Nominations for both councils are generally welcome from any source; however, the membership of a council will most likely be nominated by an instructor, appointed by an administrator, and acknowledged by the boards of education/trustees. After the council has been operational and when changes in membership are necessary, recommendations for replacement members should be solicited from the council.

In the case of the initial appointment of an advisory council, usually one-third is appointed for a one-year term, one-third for a two-year term, and one-third for a three-year term. The appointment of a council member to two three-year terms seems to be a common practice, but rarely does a council member serve more than six years. Practicing professional educators should serve only as ex-officio advisory council members.

The appointment of members (new or replacement) should be made by official action of the school chief administrator and, in some cases, the governing board. The candidate lists for membership of career and technical program advisory councils are usually assembled by the career and technical instructor. When a program council exists, the instructor may solicit the present membership for names of candidates to fill future vacancies on the council.

Orientation of Council Membership

Best practices suggests that the school administration acquaint all councils with the total education program of the school, and more specifically, the breadth and scope of the career and technical program and how the specific mission of the school system attempts to fulfill these goals within the local education program. Time should be spent discussing how the system or school attempts to meet the individual needs, interests, aptitudes, and abilities of the student with specific reference to the role of the career and technical program. The administration should also explain the role of the council as it relates to the role of the instructor, administrators, and the board of education/trustees.

Suggested Resource Information for the Council

A handbook is an effective tool in gaining greater understanding and involvement of the members. The contents of the handbook usually include:

- Table of organization of the school district/college
- Directory of the membership of the advisory council
- Calendar of council meeting dates
- Program standards, benchmarks, performance indicators (competencies)
- Program performance data (enrollment, achievement, completion, placement)
- Program evaluation findings and recommendations
- Program instructional materials
- Inventory of major instructional equipment
- Program budget
- Previous advisory council minutes

A review of the contents of the handbook during the orientation is useful in providing the new council members with the “big picture” of the current status of the career and technical education program.

Officers and Members

- Chairperson—The chairperson is elected from the committee’s membership who is a representative of business, industry, or labor. School personnel should serve as staff to the council leadership. Responsibilities include:
 - Presiding at advisory council meetings
 - Representing the advisory council at official functions and meetings
 - Organizing and appointing work committees within the council
 - Assisting in identifying the council goals, objectives, agendas, calendar and dates in conjunction with council, instructors, and school administration.
- Council members—Their responsibilities include:
 - Attending meetings
 - Suggesting agenda items
 - Providing information
 - Participating in advisory council’s discussion, analysis, and deliberation of program issues
 - Suggesting recommendations for program improvement.

Source: Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Career and Technical Education, 2003.